

LCQ16: Resumption of the ferry service plying between Tuen Mun and Central

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (February 23):

Question:

Some residents in the Tuen Mun District have relayed that with a significant increase in Tuen Mun's population in the past two decades, the existing railway and bus services have already been insufficient to meet residents' transport needs for travelling to and from the urban areas. In addition, traffic congestions occur frequently on Tuen Mun Road, while the two new trunk roads under planning will only be completed in 2036. The residents have therefore demanded the resumption of the ferry service plying between Tuen Mun and Central at the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal (TMFT). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current total population of the five Tuen Mun District Council Constituencies which are adjacent to TMFT (i.e. Siu Hei, Yuet Wu, Wu King, Butterfly and Lok Tsui); whether it has estimated the respective numbers of residents in these five constituencies and other districts who may benefit from the resumption of the aforesaid ferry service; and

(2) whether it will, by drawing reference from the current practice of providing subsidies for outlying island ferry service operators, resume the aforesaid ferry service and provide subsidies for the operator being awarded the tender, so as to give residents in the Tuen Mun District an additional transport option and, in the short term, ease the traffic congestion problem in the district; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

According to Census and Statistics Department's Population and Household Statistics Analysed by District Council District (2020 Edition), the total number of land-based non-institutional population residing in Tuen Mun District was 495 000. With reference to the results of the 2016 Population By-census, the total population of the District Council Constituency Areas of Siu Hei, Yuet Wu, Wu King, Butterfly and Lok Tsui was 70 247. The District Council Constituency Area statistics according to the 2021 Population Census will be released in mid-2022.

Outlying island ferries provide essential external transportation for the outlying islands, where there is basically no alternative to the ferry services available as a means of public transport, or the alternative land

transport route, if any, is very circuitous. To this end, since 2011, the Government has provided Special Helping Measures (SHM) to outlying island ferry routes through reimbursing ferry operators, on an accountable basis, their operational expenses, including the annual vessel survey fee and vessel repair and maintenance cost, with a view to reducing the burden of hefty fare increases on passengers and maintaining the financial viability of the ferry services.

On the other hand, in-harbour ferries mainly perform a supplementary role as an alternative public transport service to rail and road-based harbour-crossing services. The Government welcomes interested parties to apply for operation of new ferry services and stands ready to discuss with the operators and advise on service details of the proposed ferry routes. Applications will be processed in accordance with the established mechanism, taking into account all relevant factors such as the current transport policy, existing and planned public transport services, passenger demand, financial viability and availability of pier facilities. The Transport Department understands that, at present, no operator is interested in operating any ferry routes plying between Tuen Mun and Central.

Although SHM do not cover the in-harbour ferry services which play a supplementary role as an alternative public transport service, the Government has provided other helping measures to alleviate the operating costs of these routes, including taking up the maintenance work of piers where applicable, reimbursing pier rentals and exempting vessel licence fees. Moreover, the Government allows ferry operators to sub-let premises at piers for commercial and retail activities to generate non-farebox revenue to cross-subsidise the operating expenses, thereby alleviating the pressure for fare increases.

Currently, there are various kinds of public transport services such as railway and franchised buses directly connecting Tuen Mun to the urban area, providing residents with different commuting options according to their needs. Furthermore, the Government has been monitoring the traffic demand around Northwest New Territories, and actively taking forward a number of transport infrastructure projects, such as the Tuen Mun Bypass, in order to further improve the connection between Northwest New Territories and the urban area.